PHASIANUS SHAWI, Elliot.

Shaw's Pheasant.

Phasianus shawi, Elliot, P. Z. S. 1870, p. 403.—Id. Monogr. Phasian. ii. pl. 1 (1872).—Scully, Str. F. 1875, p. 433.

Phasianus insignis, Elliot, P. Z. S. 1870, p. 404.—Id. Monogr. Phasian. ii. pl. 3 (1872).

Mr. R. B. Shaw, whose interesting work on High Tartary, Yarkand, &c. is doubtless known to my readers, brought back from his expedition to the latter country three imperfect skins of Pheasants, which, having been submitted to Mr. Elliot, were pronounced by that gentleman to belong to two undescribed species; and these were accordingly named by him *P. shawi* and *P. insignis* respectively. For a highly instructive dissertation on the origin of the different kinds of true Pheasant I must refer my readers to Mr. Elliot's 'Monograph,' and must confine myself here to reproducing a very important article which has just appeared in 'Stray Feathers' from the pen of Mr. J. Scully, who, I think, succeeds in showing that *P. shawi* and *P. insignis* are referable to one and the same species:—

"During my residence in Eastern Turkestan I had abundant opportunities of observing the Yarkand Pheasant; I saw at least from thirty to forty of these birds alive, kept some in confinement for months, and have lately been looking over a series of twenty-four skins—nine in my own collection, and fifteen belonging to Mr. R. B. Shaw. While in Kâshgharia I often tried to make out whether there were two species of Pheasants there; but, as I was not aware of the precise grounds on which Mr. Elliot had separated the birds, I could not very well decide; my impression, however, was certainly in favour of one species only. I heard that the distinction was supposed to be the extent to which the breast-feathers were edged with green; but as hardly two birds could be found exactly alike in the matter of this edging, I felt satisfied that the species must have been founded on something much more definite and constant than that character.

"On going over my specimens a few days ago with Mr. Hume, that gentleman expressed his opinion that all my skins belonged to one species, although he pointed out that one of the birds had less green on the chest than the others. I then examined Mr. Shaw's collection, and found that three of his birds corresponded with the one noted by Mr. Hume; and this determined me to look at Mr. Elliot's work to see what he had said about the matter.

"The first point that struck me in regard to the plates of Phasianus insignis and P. shawi in Mr. Elliot's magnificent work was, that both the birds were erroneously represented as having conspicuous red lappets, or wattles, which the Yarkand Pheasant certainly never has at any season; the head should have been represented like that of P. colchicus, with a bare crimson orbital skin always at a lower level than the feathers of the cheek. The second piece of information I derived from the plate was that the bird having the green of the neck sharply terminated at the upper breast was the one called P. shawi, while the one having the green reflections extending all down the chest was P. insignis. I tried to find out from the text whether Mr. Elliot pointed out any distinction between his two species; but as this was not obvious on a first reading, I copied down his descriptions of the corresponding parts of P. insignis and P. shawi in opposite columns, underlined the discrepancies, and sat down to study the subject with my specimens before me. So far, then, I had ascertained what form was called P. insignis and what P. shawi; and with the two collections of twenty male Pheasants I could roughly set aside sixteen which would be called by Mr. Elliot Phasianus insignis, and four which I presume he would have accepted as P. shawi. The next point was to put down in words what the distinctions between the two sets really were. To take Mr. Elliot's descriptions first, I found that what he said would apply generally to birds in both series; and, indeed, I could only fix on six salient points:—

"a. P. insignis more brilliant than P. shawi. Nothing could be made out of this; for in the twenty birds not even three could be found exactly alike in this respect: some of the specimens were most gorgeous; and the worst were never dull.

"b. The tippings of the feathers of the back, scapulars, breast, and flanks green in P. insignis, blue in P. shawi. A careful comparison of the birds showed that this would not hold at all, some of the latter series having the tippings quite green, and many of the former series very blue.

"c. Centre of abdomen and thighs in P. insignis black, in P. shawi brownish black. This also would not hold; some P. shawi had the abdomen black or greenish black, and one or two P. insignis brownish.